

Genealogy: A Theme Issue

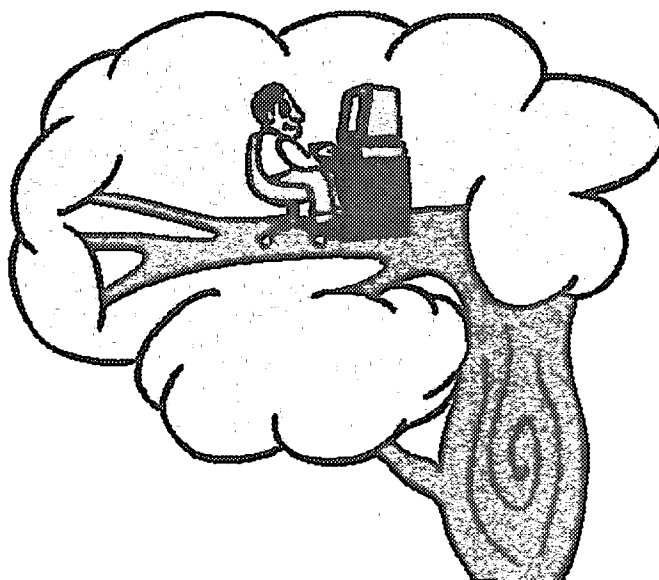
by Connie Phelps, guest editor

In Fall 1991, when the previous genealogy theme issue was published, Collin B. Hamer, Jr., the guest editor, noted the "ever-increasing demand by the public for genealogical material."¹ Genealogy has become even more popular as a hobby/interest since then. Hamer also pointed out that patrons will, at some point, exhaust the resources of their own library and need to be referred to other libraries in the state or region, thus requiring the librarians helping genealogists to be familiar with the resources of the other local libraries and institutions.

Since 1991, with the advent of the World Wide Web, which was just beginning in the early 1990s, genealogical Web sites and bulletin boards have sprung up to help share information, and other technological methods have been developed to computerize older forms of information. This proliferation of Web sites and other information available via the Internet means that some patrons may not make it to the library, but rather may try to conduct their search solely via computer. In the LOUIS consortium, public libraries now have access to AncestryPlus, a subscription database. Since the AncestryPlus database is not available remotely, patrons will need to come to their public library to use it. It is important to stress to these patrons that not every-

thing is available via the Internet. At the same time, it is important that librarians be familiar, not only with other local libraries' resources, but with some of the genealogy Web sites and databases available to researchers.

This issue contains four articles relating to genealogy. All of them contain technological resources that didn't exist in 1991. One article, written by a certified genealogist, who is an academic librarian, covers "genealogical literacy" for librarians. Several of the suggested resources in the article are Web sites or electronic mailing lists. A second article covers some free Internet Web sites to help get patrons started on genealogical research. A third article deals with the computerization of a paper tool, the NOPL Obituary Index. More and more of these types of projects are being completed, making genealogical research easier than it used to be.



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A fourth article gives basic information and specific sources for tracing African-American genealogy in Louisiana. One of the resources mentioned in this article, the Gwendolyn Midlo Hall databases, *Databases for the Study of Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, 1699-1860*, was at first a cd-rom publication and some of the information is now available via the Internet. These databases were 15 years in the compilation, and the author of the article assisted in the assemblage.

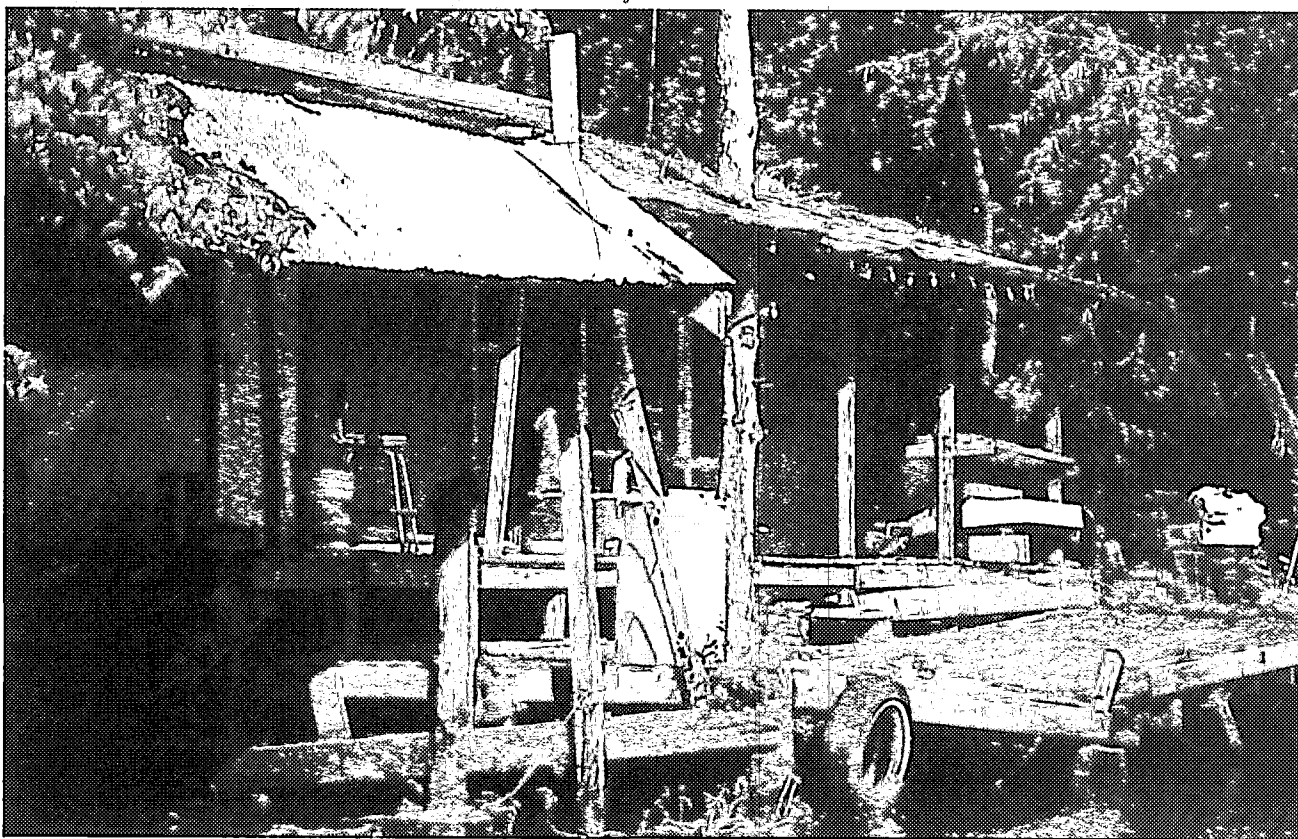
On a personal note, I became interested in genealogy over a decade ago, when I was asked by my family to write a brief family history for one of those books that counties (my family is not from Louisiana) sometimes publish on major anniversaries, where each family gets to contribute something. I knew very few facts about my maternal grandfather's family, and he had passed away before I was born, so I had to start with what the family members still remaining knew and try to verify facts and fill in information. It became a puzzle I needed to solve; a very long, complicated, unending reference question. I continued to research after the county history was written, and also began

researching other sides of my family. It is sadly ironic that, as the final touches are put on this theme issue, my maternal grandmother, the person who was the most interested in my research, has just passed away. She was so interested in my research that I had to make second copies of documents for her or have duplicates of photos made for her.

One of the first things that people are told when they begin to do genealogical research is to start with yourself, writing down what you know, and then speak to others in your family, before you start for the library or courthouse. There were many questions that I still had for my grandmother and many other research discoveries to share with her. I hope that the information in the articles in this issue assists Louisiana librarians to help our genealogical researchers in their quest.

Notes

¹Hamer, Collin B., Jr. "Genealogy in Louisiana Libraries: A Theme Issue." *LLA Bulletin* 54, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 64.



Preparing to Work with Genealogists:

by Beth Stahr

Educational and Service Opportunities for Genealogical Librarians

Genealogists come to libraries with vastly different amounts of research expertise. Librarians meet true novice genealogists who sense that the library is a good place to start. We see Internet surfers who have been enticed by an increasing array of electronic records, but who sense there must be more to genealogy than the World Wide Web. We see long-time family historians who are related to everyone in the community, but who never really research. Occasionally we encounter sophisticated researchers who understand how to collect data, evaluate evidence, and compile family histories. As always, it is up to the librarian to determine the sophistication of the patron, and suggest appropriate information resources for that individual. Librarians hold the key that unlocks the chest of genealogical resources, but more importantly, they can impact the way that researchers learn about genealogical methodology and ethics. Genealogical librarians can move the genealogical patron along the path to success by instructing them as they go.

A recent article in *American Libraries* by Gregory L. Anderson illustrates the idea that patrons' hobbies often require us to not only provide them with information, but also teach them how to continue the search. Anderson describes his sister, a sewing machine enthusiast, as being "functionally information-illiterate" because, despite her familiarity with the Internet and her electronic savvy, she never looked beyond the library catalog when she visited his library to research her hobby. He "dazzled" her by showing her how to search WorldCat, several indexes and the patent literature, and he concluded that "our future is not so much helping people locate the information they need as teaching them how to find it for themselves."¹ It seems to me that many genealogy patrons fit that same description. In addition to handing them the requested book, CD-ROM or microfilm, librarians can also provide them with the information they need to evaluate that resource and look for additional resources.

George Morgan writes a weekly online column, "Along Those Lines," that is published on the Ancestry.com Web site. Although he is not a librarian, he introduced the concept of information literacy and its application to genealogy in his April 2001 column.

Morgan urged the genealogical patron to become "genealogically information literate" in his column:

With so many demands on library personnel, it is important to recognize that their limited budgets make it impossible for many of them to give as much attention to each patron and provide the level of customer service that they would like. It is therefore imperative that you, as a genealogical researcher, become more capable of locating information resources yourself and more adept with assessing them for their appropriateness. That means you must become "information literate" about a great many materials. The good news is that you have been involved with a continuous life-long learning process, and you will continue to build and expand on your knowledge base.²

According to several recent polls, genealogy is one of the most popular forms of life-long learning in our culture. An American Demographics article reported that "60% of Americans said they were at least 'somewhat interested' in tracing their family history."³

The cover story in the special edition of *Time* magazine from April 1999 reported, "Root seeking ranks with sex, finance, and sports as a leading subject on the Internet,"⁴ and a Canadian columnist wrote in 1999 that "genealogy has become second to pornography as the most popular use of the World Wide Web, with two million sites and counting."⁵ Clearly, the fascination with family history research on the Internet and in libraries is significant, and public service librarians need to prepare to meet the needs of this ever-growing patron population.

Many libraries in Louisiana do not have the luxury of devoting a full-time librarian to genealogy. Librarians who wear multiple hats may feel overwhelmed by a user group with very specific research needs, finding aids, vocabularies, and demands. Relief is available! There are several different ways for librarians to hone their genealogy skills, including workshops, organizations, and online communication.

The Genealogy Committee of the History Section of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association (ALA)

Preparing to Work with Genealogists (continued)

offers special pre-conference genealogy sessions at mid-winter and annual ALA conferences. Announcements about the upcoming sessions can be found at the "Special Events" pages for the conferences on the ALA Web site. The experienced genealogical librarians who bridge the two communities provide invaluable instruction for librarians at these pre-conference meetings.

Similarly, librarian pre-conferences are offered at the annual conferences of the two largest national genealogical organizations, The National Genealogical Society (NGS) and the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS). These one-day seminars have traditionally been sponsored by vendors, making them very affordable for librarians to attend. Again, the presenters are practicing genealogical librarians. Information on these conferences can be found at the organizations' Web sites:

NGS <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/conf.htm> and

FGS <http://www.fgs.org/2003conf/FGS-2003.htm>

There are several more costly alternatives for genealogical training, including the weeklong course on Genealogical Librarianship at the Salt Lake Institute. According to the course description, "Upon completing this course, the genealogical librarian should be able to conduct an effective reference interview, identify, and use dozens of reference books in their own collections, and be able to refer patrons to appropriate Internet sites and collections elsewhere."⁶ Another is the elective graduate course in Library Services for Genealogical Research that is offered by the University of South Florida School of Library and Information Science. Other library schools may also offer such courses.

Since few libraries can afford to send librarians to specialized training, genealogical librarians will often opt for self-education. Just as genealogists learn by doing, genealogical librarians can learn by doing. Below are some suggestions for becoming familiar with the standards, guidelines and literature in the field of genealogy, and for communicating with other genealogical librarians.

The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual provides a set of 72 research, teaching and genealogical development standards (with examples). According to the book's introduction, these standards apply to the collection of information, evaluation of evidence, compilation of results, genealogical teaching and continuing education. They apply to many different types of genealogical "reports": print or electronic publication,

client reports, personal research files, correspondence and distribution within a family.⁷

In an ongoing effort to educate and to provide standards of conduct for genealogists, the National Genealogical Society (NGS)⁸ has created a set of guidelines and standards that librarians can use when working with patrons:

- Standards for Sound Genealogical Research
- Guidelines for Using Records, Repositories, and Libraries
- Standards for Use of Technology in Genealogical Research
- Standards for Sharing Information with Others
- Guidelines for Publishing Web Pages on the Internet
- Guidelines for Genealogical Self-Improvement and Growth

Some of these relate to how the patrons should behave in libraries, while others can assist them with compiling, publishing and sharing their compilations. All are helpful in instilling ethical considerations to the self-taught genealogist.

NGS and the individual authors allow the standards and guidelines to be reproduced, provided that the documents are copied in their entirety.

Librarians who provide copies of the standards and guidelines to genealogical patrons demonstrate a willingness to provide service and to educate, and a familiarity of the larger genealogical community.

Promotion for providing genealogical services comes not only from the genealogists, but also from within our own profession. "The Guidelines for Developing Beginning Genealogical Collections and Services" were developed by the Genealogy Committee of the History Section of RUSA in 1991, revised in 1999 and approved by the RUSA Board of Directors June 1999.⁹ The guidelines tell us that:

Genealogical reference service should include, but may not be limited to, assisting and instructing genealogical patrons to determine what research materials may help them, evaluating the significance and validity of various types of information, locating research materials through print and digital data sources and services, and providing access through inter-library loan, rental services, or referring genealogical patrons to other known libraries, institutions, agencies, and archives that have particular genealogical research materials that may be able to help them.

In order to follow these various guidelines and standards, genealogical librarians will need to read the genealogy periodical literature. Most public libraries will want subscriptions to the popular national genealogy periodicals (e.g., *Ancestry*, *Heritage Quest*, *Genealogical Computing* and *Everton's Family History Magazine*, formerly the *Genealogical Helper*) and the periodicals published by local genealogical societies (e.g., *New Orleans Genesis*, *L'Heritage* of the St. Bernard Genealogical and Historical Society, *Legacies & Legends of Winn Parish*, etc.) as well as the *Louisiana Genealogical Register*, published by the Louisiana Genealogical and Historical Society. To learn about advancements in methodology and the use of genealogical evidence, librarians will want subscriptions to the more scholarly publications like the *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, the *American Genealogist*, the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, and the *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*.

Genealogical librarians can get practical tips by subscribing to the GENEALIB electronic mailing list¹⁰ for announcements, discussion, and questions-and-answers of interest to genealogy librarians. This list is sponsored by Librarians Serving Genealogists (LSG) Web site, <http://www.cas.usf.edu/lis/genealib/> and hosted by the University of South Florida School of Library and Information Science. Drew Smith, an instructor in the school, administers this list.

Roy Matthews, a librarian formerly at Utah State University and currently at the Utah State Library, led one discussion thread on the LSG list that attempted to describe the "Genealogist Friendly Library." Our individual libraries may not have the resources or staff to provide the high level of service that he depicted, but the discussion was lively and thought provoking. Ultimately, he said his list "was an attempt to offer a self-education tool and resource for librarians who wish to do more than they currently are doing to provide services for genealogists."¹¹

The LSG Web site additionally provides some valuable resources for genealogical librarians, including pages on collection development and preservation, professional development and education, and reference and referral services. For example, Irene Hansen of the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana and Drew Smith provide a Web page entitled "Heavily Used Ready Reference Sources in Genealogy."¹²

Another popular list serve for lurking librarians is the APG-L, a moderated list serve of the Association

of Professional Genealogists (APG). APG's online searchable directory of members¹³ list 28 librarians and 26 archivists among its 1,300 international members. While this list serve does not address the same types of library issues discussed in the GENEALIB list serve, the APG-L provides a great opportunity for librarians to learn more about genealogical problem-solving as it is practiced by professionals.

One of the best hands-on products available to us (for free) is the *Librarian's Genealogy Desk Reference*¹⁴ published by

Genealogy Outreach, a partnership between the New England Historic Genealogical Society and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The desk reference¹⁵ includes a good bibliography of general and geographic-specific resources, as well as a list of 14 FAQs for genealogists, with answers! Copies of this wonderful tool have been available at ALA conferences and genealogy conferences in recent years. Copies may still be available by contacting Laura Duffy, educational services coordinator at the New England Historic Genealogical Society (<http://www.newenglandancestors.org/Default.asp>).

Good service to genealogists, who are often people with the time and/or expendable income to support this addictive hobby, can become a real boon to a library's outreach and public relations image. Libraries that understand this and take the time and effort to invest in good genealogical service and collections discover a grassroots support for the library and a mutually positive experience.

Donald S. Litzer, a genealogical librarian at the McMillan Public Library in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin, offers this concise list of specific ways that libraries can work at the local society level:

Local genealogical societies and libraries have a common interest in providing genealogical researchers with materials and expert assistance. Societies and libraries can cooperate to meet genealogists' needs through 1) collection development, access, and creation, 2) indirect reference service (i.e., societies acting as a referral service, 3) direct reference service to patrons (by mail and in person), and 4) programming, including facilities-sharing for meetings and programs.¹⁶

Sharing of genealogical materials by interlibrary loan has been a long-standing problem. Libraries rarely loan small publication runs of specialized or local history materials. In an historic move, the National Genealogical Society transferred its circulating collection of

over 20,000 books to the St. Louis County Library in Missouri in early 2002. All these books, including state, county and city histories, published abstracts of cemetery, church, courthouse, records, and over 6,000 family histories are available for interlibrary loan at our libraries.¹⁷ This interlibrary loan service is an exciting opportunity to enhance limited genealogical collections.

Librarians themselves can serve as a link between local genealogical societies and the library. Genealogical society program chairs are always anxious to find speakers for meetings, and librarians are perfect choices. Librarians may also consider teaching or team-teaching a non-credit beginning genealogy course through a continuing education program at a local school district or college or university. There are opportunities for leadership positions (officers, board members, Web masters, program chairs) in many genealogical and historical societies. Even in providing a needed meeting place for a local society or offering to host a genealogical workshop or open house, librarians can enhance the library's presence in the local community. This year, libraries should also consider promoting Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial events sponsored by local and state genealogical and historical societies and organizations.

Genealogists value librarians' knowledge, skills and service, and since 1999 NGS has awarded the annual \$1,000 Filby Prize for Genealogical Librarianship. Three of the four recipients have worked in public libraries and one in a special library. More information on the criteria and nominating procedure is available at the NGS Web site, <http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/comfilby.htm>

Opportunities for genealogical library education and quality service abound for librarians working at libraries of all sizes. By remembering that family history research is research, and by recalling our responsibility to instruction, evaluation and access, librarians can produce a win-win environment for genealogists and libraries.

Notes

¹Anderson, Gregory. "On My Mind: The Joy of Information Literacy." *American Libraries* 32, no. 8 (September 2001): 43.

²Morgan, George G. "Genealogical Information Literacy" *Along Those Lines*, April 27, 2001, <Ancestry.com> (December 1, 2002).

³Gallop-Goodman, Gerd. "Indicators: We are Family." *American Demographics* 22, no. 9 (Sept. 2000): 24.

⁴Hornblower, Margaret. "Roots Mania." *Time*, April 19, 1999.

⁵Nicol, John. "The Search of Roots: Aided by Technology, Canadians are Scrambling to Fill Out Their Family Trees." *Maclean's*, Sept. 20, 1999.

⁶Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy, "Course 9 Genealogical Librarianship," June 27, 2002, <<http://www.infouga.org/slig2003.htm>> (December 1, 2001).

⁷Board for Certification of Genealogists®, The BCG Genealogical Standards Manual. (Orem, UT: Ancestry, 2000).

⁸National Genealogical Society, Genealogical Standards, 2002, <<http://www.ngsgenealogy.org/comstandards.htm>> (December 1, 2002).

⁹History Section of the Reference and User Services Association, *American Library Association Guidelines for Developing Beginning Genealogical Collections and Services*, 2002, <http://www.ala.org/rusa/stdn_beg_gene_col.html> (December 1, 2002).

¹⁰GENEALIB Mailing List, 2002, <<http://www.cas.usf.edu/lis/genealib/list.html>> (December 1, 2002).

¹¹Matthews, Roy. "The Genealogist Friendly Library." April 17, 2000, <<http://lists.acomp.usf.edu/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=genealib>> (December 1, 2002).

¹²Hansen, Irene and Drew Smith. "LSG: Heavily Used Ready Reference Sources in Genealogy." *Librarians Serving Genealogists*, December 16, 2001, <<http://www.cas.usf.edu/lis/genealib/reference.html>> (1 December 2002).

¹³Association of Professional Genealogists, APG Directory, 2002. <<http://www.apgen.org/directory/index.php>> (1 December 2002).

¹⁴Genealogy Outreach, Librarian's Genealogy Desk Reference. (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2000).

¹⁵I prepared a short update to the Librarian's Genealogy Desk Reference for Louisiana librarians in late 2002, and I would be happy to email a copy of that update to any interested librarians. Contact me at bstahr@selu.edu

¹⁶Litzer, Donald S. "Library and Genealogical Society Cooperation in Developing Local Genealogical Services and Collections. *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 37-51.

¹⁷St. Louis County Library Special Collections, "Interlibrary Loan Procedures for the National Genealogical Society Book Loan Collection," October 25, 2002, <<http://www.slcl.lib.mo.us/slcl/sc/ngs/ngs-ill.htm>> (1 December 2002).

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Using the Internet for Genealogical Research:

A Brief Selection of Web Sites

by **Connie L. Phelps**

Traditionally, many librarians have thought of genealogy as the province of public libraries. Many academic librarians are accustomed to automatically referring genealogy patrons to their local public library, since public libraries have traditionally collected more of the printed materials that genealogists have needed for their research. With the growing interest in genealogy and the proliferation of genealogy materials available on the Internet, academic will be able to offer more assistance to patrons who ask genealogical questions. Even elementary and high schools increasingly have access to the Internet, so the basic family history assignment of finding out the names of their grandparents and great-grandparents that many students over the years have completed may lead to more genealogical assignments in schools.

Certainly it is important to note that the Internet has not replaced traditional genealogical research. Cyndi Howells, who maintains a vast index to genealogy sites on the Internet, and is the author of books on genealogical research on the Internet, points out that there is no such thing as "Internet genealogy." She points out that the Internet is "just *one* of many tools in the genealogical researcher's toolbox" and that a genealogist cannot use just the Internet and hope for complete results. She contends that it is more accurate to speak about how we "*use* the Internet *for* genealogy."¹

One of the dangers of directing patrons to the Internet for genealogical research is that they may believe that everything is on the Internet. If one is serious about genealogy research, one will still need to go to libraries, courthouses, and other sources of primary information. The library patron who is new to genealogy may need to be informed that not everything necessary for their research is available electronically. In addition to the fact that there is much genealogical information that is not obtainable online, libraries and librarians are also able to provide the researcher with research assistance that is not provided via Web sites. In genealogical research, as with other types of information "the Web is a useful research tool, but it is no substitute for a library. Library services have been greatly improved by...the use of the web, but the Web cannot replace all of the services offered by a good library."²

There are two main types of genealogical records: compiled records, which are records of previous research by others, such as a biography, family history, or genealogy; and original records, which are records created at or near the time of an event, such as birth, marriage, death, or census records. Many genealogy Web sites are predominately compiled records. Much of the genealogical

information found on the Internet will still need to be verified. Serious genealogists will want copies of the original documents.

The use of the Internet for genealogy is a double-edged sword. On the positive side, material that is on the Internet is much more accessible to researchers. When researchers find someone else that has been researching their family, it can save them time, travel, and money. People may find that a distant cousin has already located a missing part of their family. On the other hand, some of the information that is available online may be inaccurate. Perhaps someone had erroneous information about a birthdate of an ancestor. He may, without realizing that the information was incorrect, have posted it on a Web site. Then, along came other researchers who found the information online, didn't check the accuracy of the dates, and used that incorrect information in their research. Of course, these errors happened in print materials, too. It is just easier and more accessible now to download the incorrect information from an Internet site into a genealogical software program.

Since genealogy is one of the most popular topics on the Internet, there are a vast number of genealogy sites. So, with many people newly interested in genealogy, and so many genealogy Web sites available, how is a librarian to direct a patron through the maze of Web sites? Entire books have been written on online genealogy. Just to list the books themselves would take a lot more space than just a brief article. First, it is important to distinguish between a software program that is used to keep track of a person's research and a Web site that provides access to primary or secondary materials. There are quite a number of software programs, each with unique features. These programs are usually something that a genealogical researcher will want to have on his own computer when he gets to a certain stage. This article will not discuss these programs.

There are many different kinds of genealogy Web sites and databases. There are the mega-sites, which provide either fee or free access to many kinds of information—from previously published material, to scanned-in or typed-in primary materials, to genealogy mailing lists and message boards, to individual family trees. Some genealogy Web sites are subscription sites; some are completely free. Trying to divide Internet genealogy resources into two groups, fee and free, may be a bit difficult, as even some fee or subscription resources may provide a certain amount of information for free. The following is a sampling of some of the features of the largest, most popular, free genealogy Web sites, along with their coverage of

specifically Louisiana-related material. The best way to become familiar with their features is to try them.

Cyndi's List

A good starting place to refer patrons who are beginning genealogical research is Cyndi's List, <http://www.cyndislist.com>, an online directory of genealogical Web sites. The site currently indexes and cross-references over 174,000 genealogy links into more than 150 categories. Currently, Cyndi's List alphabetically indexes genealogy sites from A (Acadian, Cajun & Creole) to W (Writing Your Family's History). As a subheading under "United States," there is a section called States, Regions & Localities within the States. Currently, there are nearly 2,000 links under Louisiana. Cyndi's indexing also provides a broad category list that includes subjects such as Localities, Computers and the Internet, Help from Others, and Research Tools & Reference Materials. Beginning genealogy patrons may be a little anxious and want to look for a specific person's name immediately, but a little time spent with some of the links in Cyndi's List will provide them with lots of suggestions and background information about what to search and where to search for the person.

AncestryPlus

Many people, whether they are interested in genealogy or not, have heard of Ancestry.com. Ancestry advertises heavily, even on Web sites that have nothing to do with genealogy. Ancestry.com is a large, popular, partly free/partly fee genealogy Web site. A version of it, AncestryPlus, is available free to Louisiana public library users in Louisiana parish libraries, so it is listed here, even though the database is a subscription database, not a free database. Unfortunately, the product is not available to Louisiana academic libraries through the LOUIS consortium. AncestryPlus is a collaboration between Ancestry.com and the Gale Group. Part of the "Plus" in the library version of the product is the inclusion of two useful Gale products—the *Gale Passenger and Immigration Lists Index*, as well as Gale's *Biography and Genealogy Master Index*.

A patron sitting down at the home page of AncestryPlus sees a search box that will allow searchers to enter the name of a person that they are searching for. The search engine will conduct a "global search" through all of the sources in the product and return any findings for the name in categories such as Census; Birth, Marriage & Death; Military; Court, Land & Probate; and Community & Message Boards. Sources are constantly being added.

The census portions of AncestryPlus can save the researcher a great deal of time, since the database includes not only census indexes from 1790 through 1870 (head of household only) but also scanned images of all of the

available censuses, from 1790 through 1930. Ancestry has compiled a head of household index to the 1920 census and an every name index to the newly released 1930 index. Where the indexing of a census is complete, there is a link from the index that goes directly to the image of the census page. This saves the patron from waiting for the time-consuming borrowing of census microfilm.

One feature of the AncestryPlus product is the Ancestry World Tree. This portion is comprised of files of family trees that are submitted by Ancestry users. All files are taken "as is" and the completeness and accuracy of the information are not guaranteed. Ancestry World Tree has combined its information with RootsWeb.com's WorldConnect (see below), so a researcher needs only to search one of these sites.

An AncestryPlus global search also provides indexing for the Ancestry and RootsWeb message boards. Message boards are a very important tool in genealogical research. Persons may either search the message boards to find information, or may post a query for information. In addition to the above-mentioned compiled databases and primary source documents, AncestryPlus has online newsletters and how-to hints, useful blank forms that may be printed out (such as family group sheets, ancestral charts, and blank census forms for recording information located).

The Web site offers a "Search by Location" feature, which will allow researchers to locate Louisiana-specific information in the following categories: Databases (which include all of the federal censuses through 1930, as well as databases containing other records), Sources (such as where to write for vital records, How-To's (such as information about Louisiana adoption practices and Louisiana land records), and Maps.

The AncestryPlus database, though it is a Gale Group database, doesn't allow for remote access. The patrons will need to come into the library to use it. Patrons with home Internet access may become individual subscribers to Ancestry.com. Currently, a year's basic personal subscription to Ancestry.com is \$99. Other components, such as the census indexes and images cost individual subscribers additional fees.

Family Search

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), also known as the Mormons, has amassed a wealth of genealogy material. The church has the largest genealogical library in the world in Salt Lake City, Utah. The collection includes books, microfiche, and microfilm. There are library branches, called Family History Centers, all over the world. In Louisiana, there are 14 Family History Centers. These centers can borrow materials from the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, and are staffed by volunteers.

Many public librarians are familiar with the FamilySearch CD-ROM collection. Much of the same information is now available via a Web version of the databases, <http://www.familysearch.org>. The Web site provides a search box, which searches several unique databases—the Ancestral File, International Genealogical Index (IGI), Pedigree Resource File, Vital Records Index, along with family history Web sites. The “All Resources” search also includes the United States Social Security Death Index. The 1880 U.S. census, 1881 British Isles census and the 1881 Canadian censuses have just been added to the site. The site also allows one to search the extensive holdings of the Family History Library catalog. Personal Ancestral File (not to be confused with the Ancestral File database), produced by the LDS Church, one of many genealogy software programs, is available to download free of charge from Familysearch.org. This program will allow patrons to save data directly from the FamilySearch databases into the program.

The Ancestral File contains information, such as date and place of birth, marriage, or death, on millions of people linked into family groups and pedigrees submitted to the church by individuals and organizations around the world. The Web site cautions: “Ancestral File is a collection of genealogical information taken from Pedigree Charts and Family Group Records submitted to the Family History Department since 1978. The information has not been verified against any official records. Since the information in Ancestral File is contributed, it is the responsibility of those who use the file to verify its accuracy.” The submitters’ names and addresses are provided.

The International Genealogical Index, (IGI) lists several hundred million names of deceased persons from throughout the world. It also lists some vital information for the persons, such as a birth or marriage date and place. Many names in the index come from vital records from the early 1500s to 1885, which have been copied or “extracted.” If available, the source information, such as the microfilm number, is given. Other information has been submitted by members of the LDS Church, and there may not be a source document available.

The Pedigree Resource File contains names; family relationships; and birth, marriage, and death information for millions of people. The information in this file appears as it was originally submitted. The Pedigree Resource File is a new lineage-linked database of records available on compact disc containing family history records submitted by individuals through FamilySearch Internet Genealogy Service. Family information is organized in family groups and pedigrees. The online version gives the name and address of the submitter, as well as

the compact disc number. The compact disc version includes submitted notes and sources. Many charts and reports can be printed from this data. Each compact disc contains about 1.1 million names.

The Vital Records Index (VRI) contains birth, christening, and marriage records from selected countries around the world. The online version currently contains only records for Mexico and Scandinavia. Some names found in the Vital Records Index may also be found on the International Genealogical Index (IGI). The indexes are not complete.

FamilySearch “All Resources” searches may be limited to Louisiana records. Other specifically Louisiana-related information may be found under the Research Guidance and Research Helps tabs. Since LDS records usually center around the “events” of birth, marriage and death, the Louisiana Research Guidance page is divided into time periods by these headings. From this point, researchers are offered a brief historical background of the state, with other suggested references; information for beginners, including a list of Louisiana Statewide Indexes and Collections; and a Search Strategy section, with types of records arranged in a suggested research order. There is also a very thorough Research Outline for Louisiana, which lists many sources of information.

RootsWeb

“The primary purpose and function of RootsWeb is to connect people so that they can help each other and share genealogical research. Most resources on RootsWeb are designed to facilitate such connections.”³ The Web site is located at <http://www.rootsweb.com>. Even though some databases are shared with Ancestry.com, unlike AncestryPlus/Ancestry.com, all of the information on RootsWeb is currently free to the public. However, since RootsWeb is now funded and supported by Ancestry.com, there is also an Ancestry.com search box on the RootsWeb main page. As with the other Web sites mentioned here, there is a section devoted to getting started with genealogical research and other guides to research.

RootsWeb has several large and important resources. RootsWeb sponsors the WorldConnect Project, which has just merged with Ancestry’s Ancestry World Tree mentioned above. The WorldConnect Project allows users to upload, modify, link, and display their family trees as a means to share their work with other researchers. The site also hosts over 26,000 genealogy electronic mailing lists, including many locality mailing lists and surname mailing lists, which are searchable and browsable. The RootsWeb message boards are very important sources of information and wonderful places to connect with other researchers.

The RootsWeb Surname List (RSL) is a registry of more than one million surname entries that have been submitted by online genealogists. Associated with each surname are time periods covered by the researcher, locations of the surname, and information about how to contact the person who submitted the surname. Locating another person who is researching the same surname in the same geographical area during a specific time period can be an invaluable help to a new researcher.

Louisiana-related content includes RootsWeb's message boards for Louisiana and for all of its parishes. Mailing lists for the state and parishes are also available. There is a link from the main page to State Resources. The Louisiana resources page includes some useful links. RootsWeb provides server space for the LAGenWeb pages (see below).

USGenWeb Project

The USGenWeb Project, <http://www.usgenweb.org> founded in 1996, "consists of a group of volunteers working together to provide Internet Web sites for genealogical research in every county and every state of the United States."

⁴The USGenWeb Pages, as are most of the states' GenWeb pages, are hosted by RootsWeb. The primary unit of organization for the USGenWeb Project is the county (or parish). County Web sites may include transcriptions of cemetery records, marriage records, census records, Bible record, wills, obituaries, tax records, biographies, historic maps and county histories. At this time, the marriage records, Bible records and other similar types of material are usually single entries posted by researchers, rather than transcribed lists of county records. The county GenWeb sites usually include a list of lookup volunteers, as well as a list of what they are willing to search. A queries section is usually available for each county. Sometimes these are independent query lists, but often they link to the RootsWeb Message Board for the county. Since the project is volunteer-dependent, the design and amount of content varies widely from county to county. Many counties have very little content available. All counties are looking for contributors! While a major part of the project is arranged at the county level, the state Web sites have statewide information. The Louisiana portion of the USGenweb Project, known as LAGenWeb, primarily consists of links to the parish Web sites. At this still very early stage of the GenWeb sites, it is not terrible likely that a person will find transcriptions of sources that will help them, but as the sites add information, it will become more likely. One advantage of the parish pages is that there are local people involved, so that a searcher may find a local contact in the area.

There are some parts of the USGenWeb Project that are being done at a national level. Three of the major nationwide projects are census transcriptions, tombstone

transcriptions, and a Digital Library (Archives) Project, which offers actual transcriptions of public domain records. It contains copies of census records, marriage bonds, wills, and other public documents. There is a search engine that will allow searching of the contents of all the text files in the USGenWeb Archives, as well as search engines for each of the states.

In addition to the national, state and county/parish sites and information, there is also a page called "Help for Researchers," which includes basic getting-started tips, links to other getting-started pages and links to genealogical forms such as family group sheets, which may be downloaded. The miscellaneous information links (Cousins Explained, Old Occupations Explained, etc.) provide additional help. There is also a WorldGenWeb Project, www.worldgenweb.org, which is working on providing access to records in other areas of the world.

There are many other useful, free, smaller, more-specific genealogy sites that will interest patrons, such as the Ellis Island Web site, <http://www.ellislandrecords.org>. Lists of these sites may be found through links from Cyndi's List or some of the above named resources. The Internet is very dynamic. Web pages may come and go. Likewise, content that is on one of these Web sites may be moved or removed. The Web sites discussed here, chosen in part for their size, free status, and useful information, have also been around for several years. For example, though FamilySearch.org is fairly new to the Web, the data has been being collected and made available (via CD-ROM databases, for example) for much a much longer period of time. And, though the content of the Web sites may change, more content is being added than is being removed. Genealogical research on the Internet is an active, thriving topic.

Notes

¹Howells, Cyndi. "Internet Genealogy" <<http://www.cyndislist.com/internet-gen.htm>> (December 13, 2002).

²Weston, Wil. "Access to Scientific Literature: The web can complement libraries, but not replace them." *Nature*, 7 November 2002: 19.

³RootsWeb.com. "Share Your Family History" <<http://searches.rootsweb.com/share.html>> (December 26, 2002).

⁴USGenWeb Project. "What is the USGenWeb Project?" <<http://www.usgenweb.org/about/about.html>> (December 26, 2002).

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The Obituary Index Project: A Collaborative Gateway to Local History

by Gerald F. Patout, Jr.

Genealogists and local historians are converging on libraries and information repositories in record numbers, armed with questions, and determined to locate answers buried in the documentary annals of the past. This crusade is sometimes met with the same confounding and perplexing problems that challenge library genealogy and local history professionals—a proliferation of information resources, the question of the accuracy and validity of certain sources, and the daunting and repetitive task of instructing end users in meaningful inquiry and research. To aid in this search, the New Orleans Public Library (NOPL) and The Historic New Orleans Collection (THNOC) are collaborating on an effort to computerize and then upload to their institutional Web sites NOPL's Louisiana Biography & Obituary Index, the primary local history reference tool card file index of biographical information found in New Orleans newspaper obituaries from approximately 1804 to 1972. Currently, 14 aging metal file cabinets on the third floor of the Louisiana Division of the New Orleans Public Library contain over 650,000 index cards of information, some with multiple citations that have been described as a treasure trove and remarkable historical chronicle of local characters and color.

Origins of the Index

The Obituary File was begun by Works Progress Administration (WPA) staff working in the City Archives Department in the 1930s. The department was located in City Hall (now Gallier Hall) and the adjacent annex building on St. Charles Avenue. It contained, in addition to the manuscript journals and ledgers of city government dating from 1769, the largest collection of bound New Orleans newspapers in existence. From this newspaper archive, the Obituary Index was created as one of several WPA indexing projects conducted in that department (including the Louisiana News Index, which provides coverage of news articles, exclusive of obituaries). The indexes were kept up by the City Archives Department staff after the WPA project closed down.

Although the City Archives Department was transferred by ordinance in 1946 to the New Orleans Public Library, it was not until December 1947 that the newspaper files and the WPA indexes were moved to the old main library on Lee Circle. As the library staff began to go over the Obituary Index cards, they began to uncover inadequacies in the file. It included references only to deaths of prominent citizens, and it usually omitted editorials or feature stories relating to deaths (instead, such articles were filed in the Louisiana News Index under such

unhelpful topics as "people"). The Obituary File was also divided into three sections: 1804-1936, 1936-45 and "current," the last category covering the portion of 1946 that had been completed at the time of the transfer to the library. To remedy these deficiencies, library staff initiated a project, beginning with the year 1946 and extending forward, to index *all* obituaries. They also began to re-index retrospective time periods, beginning with the Civil War era, in order to fill in incomplete coverage.

Because of staffing limitations, the Louisiana News Index shut down permanently in the 1960s; coverage stops at the end of 1963. Staff work on the Obituary File continued, but in the early 1970s volunteers were recruited to take over the project. The decision was made to stop ongoing coverage of obituaries at the end of 1972, when printouts of indexes to statewide death certificates began (temporarily, it turned out) to be made available. The volunteers began to concentrate on filling in the gaps in the index that the library staff had never had the time to work on. This volunteer effort brought full coverage back to 1858 before the project was put on hold for a number of years. In 1998, the project was revitalized, and a massive effort was made by several volunteers to fill in coverage of obituaries in the *Daily Picayune* back to its beginning in 1837.

When this part of the project was completed, NOPL could finally say that the Obituary File had complete coverage from 1837-1972. While only the *Daily/Times Picayune* is fully indexed, the index also includes references from the old *New Orleans States* and the *New Orleans Item* during the post-World War II years, from all New Orleans dailies during the Civil War era, and from a number of other newspapers, such as the *Louisiana Gazette*.

The index also includes references to biographies of Louisianans appearing in selected collective biographies published before 1960. Thus, the index eventually came to be designated the "Louisiana Biography & Obituary Index."

Computers & Collaboration—A New Age for a Card Index

After much discussion, careful deliberation between the institutions, and even a summer of field testing the possibilities for such a challenging undertaking loaded with enormous potential and some peril, an agreement of co-operation to begin the project was signed in April 2000, and in June of that year, two part-time staffers from the Historic New Orleans Collection began data input on premises at the New Orleans Public Library. Arriving at

The Obituary Index Project: A Collaborative Gateway to Local History (continued)

this point of data input was also the result of considerable application software analysis and technology discussions between the participating institutions that would not only satisfy the purposes of the effort, but would be visionary in addressing the needs of this slumbering body of print information.

Although numbers of criteria were employed to evaluate various database options, two interrelated and important factors guided the final decision in selecting the Minisis database management tool for this project. Firstly, additional vendor costs for proprietary web uploading program software, and, secondly, the fact that The Historic New Orleans Collection had just chosen Minisis as their new institutional information management software were critical factors that impacted this project decision.

The Minisis application selected was designed and built to meet the general requirements for this database project as well as simultaneously to meet the greater institutional information management needs of the archival, library and museum components of The Historic New Orleans Collection. Minisis is a multi-platform object-oriented relational database management tool that has been developed, distributed and supported since 1975 by the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa, Canada. Fully bilingual, with over 450 pre-

defined data elements, the user-friendly nature and easy customization features provided application development and solutions for this specific database project that enabled the project to take off. A sample of the customized Minisis Obit Index main data input screen is provided to demonstrate some of the types of fields of information and various features of software tool.

[See Illustration 1 - Data Input Screen – Main Screen]

Since June 2000, THNOC data input staffers are now routinely entering individual card information, like names, death dates, and the specific newspaper citation(s) into the computer database. Recognizing the tedious and monotonous nature of this process, the data input process does get interrupted and slows when specific concerns about information contained on a certain card is questioned. To this end, the project utilizes volunteer support staff that routinely check “snag” obit cards with newspaper citations, enabling the data input personnel to specifically continue data input. Starting with the A’s and B’s of the card file index, project data input staffers have now developed very keen senses related to obit card details as well as the nuances related to the handwritten notes or the numerous typefaces on these historic records. In addition to maintaining a

Data Input Screen - Main Screen

WSOBIT2/ObitMain

NOPL Obituary Index: Data Entry/Update

Honoric: ☐ Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Miss ☐ Ms First Name: Last Name: Middle Name: Nicknames: 1 of 1 M/F: ☐ M ☐ F

Maiden Name: First: Last: Middle: Notes:

Date of Death: 1877-09-13 Age at Death: Years: 44 Months: Infant: ☐ Other: References: 1 of 1

Citation: 1 of 2 Publication: Date: Language: Page/Col/Section: 1 of 1

DAILY PICAYUNE - Daily Picayune 1877-09-14 4 3 Notes:

Relatives Death 2001-03-14 OK Cancel

Illustration 1 - Data Input Screen – Main Screen

processing journal that records the development of this project, the data input personnel regularly spot noteworthy and some very interesting obituary index cards. With this process in place and over 2,000 hours of data input having been completed, nearly 70,000 obit index cards have been keyed into the new computer database. Also, countless volunteer hours have been employed in validating and verifying specific card data.

Importance of the Obituary Index

For the genealogist and local historian, the importance of the Obituary Index is found in the access to newspaper information and the focus that it provides when initiating a specific inquiry. The index can help researchers rapidly narrow a genealogy search to a specific time frame, a specific religious affiliation or specific sets of government and religious records, thus making more efficient use of time and effort. In addition to access and search strategy attributes, the index tells us about ourselves, the community and collectively records local history over a substantial time period. Besides historical demographic data, the computerized indexed information will be able to detect trends, verify those periods of epidemics as well as economic prosperity. As an access point to research as well as confirming legal information, the computerized edition of the index is certain to broaden and expand accessibility, making use faster, simpler and more productive for end users. For genealogists, web accessible and computerized obit index records will certainly accelerate the process of substantiating all-important birth, death and cemetery location, all-important aspects of basic genealogical inquiry.

As the computerized obit index begins to take shape in electronic form, the body and the "soul" of print card

file information extracted and compiled thus far is quite telling and interesting. Obit cards do tell us that voodoo doctors were actually a part of the local landscape as were any number of characters who roamed the streets of the French Quarter. Noted authors Henry Castellanos and Robert Tallant mention the mystical cast of New Orleans characters in their respective writings, but the Obit Index actually validates voodoo doctor James Alexander's colorful existence in time and space.

[See Illustration 2 - Alexander, James - Obituary card from NOPL Index]

Miss Louisiana "Lulu" Rebel Blackmar is not only noteworthy in name, but her obit notes that her very famous father, A.E. Blackmar, a prolific and controversial songwriter was fined and imprisoned during General Benjamin Butler's occupation of New Orleans for publishing the "Bonnie Blue Flag." Personalities aside, the computerized index literally speaks to our native tongues, eccentricities and ethnicities. Blanchard family names are very rich and revealing, with Clerfruy, Clerphe, Clesida, as well as, Odalie, Oliziphore, Onesaphore and Orelo Blanchard being just a linguistic sampling of some of the exotic first names! The computer index picks out "place" name people like Illinois Barconey and Mrs. Kentucky Barclay and "cool" names like Etienne Beausoleil Batcave. There are "nicknames" for "Okey Dokey" Bagnerise and "Short Block" Adams but perhaps, most indicative of the power and potentiality for this developing electronic resource, the obit citation for one Joseph B. Albite declares on his obituary card that he died of lock jaw!

Whether this collaborative endeavor produces what some might consider rather esoteric scraps of biographical information or whether it realistically documents actual footprints on the path to local history, the automation of the Obituary Index is certain to serve as primary vehicle for launching genealogical inquiry related to New Orleans and Louisiana. Replication of this collaborative model between institutions and organizations sharing common goals of public service is one that should be considered by the entire Louisiana library community.

Gerald F. Patout, Jr. is head librarian at the The Historic New Orleans Collection.

ALEXANDER, JAMES (COLORED)		AGE: 57
(VOUDOU DOCTOR)		
DIED: 8-19-1890		
D.P. 8-20-1890	PG. 8	COL. 3

Illustration 2 - Alexander, James - Obituary card from NOPL Index

African American Genealogy Research in Louisiana

by Gregory G. Osborn

Ever since Alex Haley's groundbreaking book, *Roots*, more and more African Americans have begun to trace their family history. Kinship and family are very important to most African Americans given that so many individuals were separated from their families and homelands in Africa by the horrors of the slave trade. Even after their arrival, Africans and their descendants were sometimes again separated from their families and home here in America because of slave sales, auctions, and personal misfortunes or greed of their owners. It is because the majority of Africans and their descendants were property here in the New World that we are able to trace them in the past.

Louisiana is fortunate to have a multitude of records that record individual slave sales, estate inventories and sales, slave mortgages, slave emancipations, tax records,

and runaway notices in area newspapers. Many of these records record the name of the slave, their age, occupation, sex, color, their African ethnicity or place of birth, their monetary value or price, and sometimes their state of health and personality characteristics. This article will give you the basic background and general history on conducting African and African descent research here in Louisiana: how to get started; where to look for information, forms, vital records, censuses, etc.

One of the basic tenets in conducting genealogical research is to work from the present back into the past, or rather go from the known to the unknown. When doing African American research in Louisiana we can divide Louisiana's history into nine parts. The Colonial period first under the French (1699-1769) and secondly under the Spanish (1769-1802), the territorial period (1803-1812), the early American and antebellum (1812-1861), Civil War (1861-1865) emancipation and reconstruction (1865-1877), Jim Crow (1880s-1896), segregation (1896-1964), and the Civil Rights Era (1950s-1960s). Each era is important in documenting the African and African American family. You will want to know when and from where your ancestors came and at what period of time they arrived here in Louisiana. This information will help you to narrow down sources that are available during different times in Louisiana history.

The most detailed information on enslaved Africans and their descendants is available in records during the Spanish period of the late 18th century and the territorial and early American period of the early 19th century. It is during these periods that one finds African ethnicities included overwhelmingly with information on individual slaves and free people of color. It was also the time period in which a small but significant percentage of Africans and their descendants became free here in Louisiana. This article will cover both Free People of Color and enslaved Africans and African Americans.

African American genealogy is not too different from other types of genealogy. You will start the same way as everyone else and you will use the same forms, it's only when you are going back into slavery that your research path becomes more difficult, but not impossible. At this point your sources will be different



but in many cases you will have to basically trace two families: your own, and if your ancestors were enslaved, the family who owned them.

Getting Started: Forms

The first step in tracing your family tree is to fill in a family tree or pedigree chart. A family tree chart is a visual map with lines and spaces for you to fill out basic vital information on yourself, your parents, your grandparents, and further generations back into your families past. You will record birth, marriage and death information on your direct ancestors on this chart. You can obtain family tree charts from your local library or off the Internet. The family tree chart is very important because it serves as a guide for your research. Always include maiden names of your female ancestors.

Another form to use is a family group sheet. As the family tree chart helps to document direct ancestors, the family group sheet documents entire families, showing siblings of your ancestors, as well as cousins, aunts, uncles, etc. Remember you are conducting research on your family, which evolved from several families. To complete the family group sheet start with your immediate family where you are listed as a child, your father will be listed at the top followed by your mother. There is also a place to list your parents' parents (your grandparents). List your oldest sibling next then the others by order of birth in the family, oldest first to the youngest. List yourself in the order of your own birth in the family. Put birthdates, christening dates, marriage dates, death dates and burial dates for each individual. Do a family group sheet for each individual family you are tracing. If a person was married more than once, do a separate group sheet for each marriage, regardless of whether any children were born to the marriage.

It is a good idea to keep a genealogy log or notebook that documents where, when, and how you go about your research. This way you will avoid duplicating your research and can stay focused and organized. It is usually a record of the repository where you conducted research, the date of your visit, and what you found or accomplished. By keeping a journal or log sheet you can focus on a particular area (geographic), line of your family, etc. Doing genealogy usually generates hundreds, if not thousands, of paper copies of censuses, birth, marriage and death records, obituaries, successions, tax records, city

directories, photographs, and many more items. Try and always stay focused and organized, it will definitely save you time and effort in the long run.

Oral Interviews

Before you start filling in your family tree chart and family group sheet you can start conducting oral interviews with your oldest family members. Family history is usually passed down from one generation to the next by oral tradition and family stories. The oral tradition is even more important in tracing Africans and African Americans, because of the African tradition of the griot. A griot was a member of some African tribes who memorized oral and family histories and tribal stories to be retold for the chief's and tribe's benefit. Oral tradition is also extremely important in African and African American genealogy because of the ban on teaching and educating slaves how to read and write. You usually will find at least one family member who knows much of the family history in yours, your parents', grandparents' and possibly great-grandparents' generation. That person can usually tell you how you are distantly related to cousins and other relatives because of a well-known common distant ancestor.

Oral interviews can be taken by written notes, audiotapes, or even video taped for posterity. Ask basic questions of the interviewees: When and where were they born? Who were their parents—grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents? Where did the family live? Die? What did members of the family do for a living? Where is the family buried? Where did the family live, what states, counties and or cities of residence? What religion did they practice and what and which churches did they attend? Where did you go to school? If the interviewee is not clear on dates, try and approximate the date of a certain event by asking the age of the interviewee when a certain event occurred, i.e. "How old were you when your baby sister was born? Where were you when aunt so and so got married? Were you attending school or college when your grandmother passed away? Ask to see old family photos and make sure you bring a camera to take pictures of them for a copy. Use old family photos to jog the memories of older interviewees. Now that you have some information to start with you can begin gathering more information on your family.

Starting Your Record and Documents Search

Before going to a genealogy library, research center, archive, or repository, gather family documents from home and from other family members. These are birth, marriage and death certificates, church records, deeds, family photos, and any other important documents or information that establishes dates, relationships, and places pertinent to your family search.

Records that show birth, marriage and death are known as *vital records* because they give information on life events. New Orleans started to record births in 1818 for whites and free people of color but the state of Louisiana did not start recording births until 1914. The Office of Vital Records in New Orleans has birth records for the entire state for the last 100 years; records prior to 100 years ago are located at the Louisiana State Archives in Baton Rouge. These records are mostly for New Orleans, although there are some records for Shreveport and Jefferson Parish. Birth records record the name of the person born, their parents, date and place of birth, and race of child and parents. There are indices to these available birth records.

Another source for birth information may be obtained from baptismal records contained in various churches and or archdiocesan archives. This of course would pertain to ancestors who were baptized, married or buried by the Catholic Church. Because of the Code Noir and the monopoly of the Catholic religion in colonial Louisiana, many Africans and their descendants were required to be members of the Catholic Church. Louisiana is one of the few places that have records of thousands of enslaved and free Africans and their descendants. Unfortunately, the New Orleans Archdiocesan Archives does not publish records of slaves and Native Americans simply because they do not have a surname. They also do not publish any racial, color, or legitimacy information of individuals. So, if your ancestors were Catholic you may be able to trace them back into slavery or before the advent of state and city vital records. To obtain church records you will have to know the name, place of residence, and approximate date the event occurred. The New Orleans Archdiocese is the only archive that follows such guidelines. Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Alexandria, Shreveport and Mobile have published more complete records of all people regardless of race or ethnicity.

Marriage records are usually kept at the parish level but most often slave marriages were not legal even if they were conducted in a church. Many times slaves would need their owner's permission in order to get married (religious ceremony). There are records of free persons of color in sacramental and civil registers. The Freedmen Bureau did record some marriages of former slaves after emancipation (1865). Check the marriage index of the parish where your ancestors lived. Often, marriage records and or certificates list parents of the bride and groom, witnesses, and person conducting the marriage ceremony.

Death records like birth records were recorded earlier in New Orleans than the rest of the state. The Office of Vital Records in New Orleans has death records for the entire state for the last 50 years; records prior to 50 years ago are located at the Louisiana State Archives in Baton Rouge. Death records provide name and race of decedent, place of death, and later death records (post Civil War) usually give cause of death and burial information. Obituaries in area newspapers also provide information about deceased persons. Often they give family, burial, and funeral information. In large to medium sized cities there is usually in obituary index such as the one kept in the Louisiana Division of the New Orleans Public Library (1804-1972). If your ancestor or relative is not listed in the obituary index or no index is available you should still search the newspaper or newspapers after the date of death your ancestor or relative died. Death records are extremely important because they provide information on ancestors and relatives who may have lived during the time of slavery; they may also provide parents names of people enslaved.

Census Records

The United States Government has taken a census of its inhabitants starting in 1790 and every ten years after. A census is basically a count of the population, usually broken down by state, parish/county, and sometimes other divisions. The information is used to determine the number of representatives for each state and how to allocate resources. In Louisiana, the first federal census was taken in 1810 when Louisiana was still a territory. There were earlier censuses of various outposts and of New Orleans during the French and Spanish colonial periods. The earlier censuses (pre-1850), list only free heads of households. Slaves and children are not listed by name

but by sex and age aggregates. 1850 was the first census where all free people were listed. Slaves were again listed by sex, color, and age.

The 1870 census would be the first census where all individuals were listed regardless of race and former status (free or enslaved). Currently the most recent census for which personal information is available is the 1930 census. There is a 72-year privacy law, which allows the personal information in the census to only be released 72 years after it was taken. Census records provide information on individuals, families and institutions such as, first and last names, age at time the census was taken, literacy and language spoken, employment, marital status, relationship to householder, location of birth, and place of birth of parents. Census records are very important in African American research because they often give you names of enslaved ancestors and relatives. You are now ready to go further back in your research to the era before the Civil War.

Slave Records

For African Americans who were enslaved in Louisiana prior to the Civil War, the search for ancestry is difficult, but not impossible. When conducting research in this period, a crucial part of your research will be the tracing of the owner's family of your ancestors and relatives. Once you have identified such families, look up legal, financial and vital information on them such as wills, marriage records, powers of attorney, state and local taxes, inventories of estates, slave sales and purchases in conveyance records, mortgages, and emancipation records. Comb through this information for reference to family owned slaves. Information such as name of the enslaved, age, color, occupation, and family relations can be found in these documents. These records can be found in the parish courthouses in places where your ancestors and their owners lived as well as various archives, libraries, and specialized repositories. Many of these records have been microfilmed and can be found in the Louisiana Division of New Orleans Public Library as well as Church of the Latter Day Saints (The Mormons) Family History Centers.

Emancipation Records

The City of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana had one of the largest free populations of color in the United States. Most slaves were emancipated during the

Spanish Colonial period of Louisiana History (1769-1802) and the years of the American territorial period and early statehood (1803-1825). During the Spanish Colonial period, slaves could buy their freedom, or if their owners were reluctant, slaves could go to court and petition to have their value set in an open court and pay the price of their value. However, by 1830, emancipation was more restricted by the Louisiana State Legislature.

Most descendants of Louisiana's Creole Free People of Color population can trace their freedom to the Spanish period. Some free people immigrated to Louisiana as free from France and Europe, the Caribbean, Latin American, and other parts of North America. Approximately 3,500 Free People of Color immigrated to Louisiana from St. Domingue (Haiti) by 1809.

Original emancipation records can be found in the Notarial Archives, 1769-1900 (New Orleans), or outside of New Orleans in various parish courthouses. A database of Louisiana emancipation records as well as slave sales and slave inventories is available via the Gwendolyn Midlo Hall Databases¹ accessed through the Internet or cd-rom.

Conclusion

This article is meant only to be an introduction into African American genealogy research in Louisiana. Hopefully it will help you (the librarian) and the patron (the researcher) to get started and answer basic questions. This article does not attempt to answer more advanced questions on the subject or to deal with computer or Internet sources. Remember that it takes years of painstaking research to fully trace any family, but try and have patience and fortitude in searching. The rewards are innumerable. Louisiana is blessed with many rich sources: sales records, inventories, sacramental records, many of which have been published or are available in database form.

Notes

¹Hall, Gwendolyn Midlo, ed. *Databases for the Study of Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, 1699-1860*. (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000) and *Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy 1719-1820*. <<http://www.ibiblio.org/laslave/index.html>>

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